

Remote teaching during the Covid 19: Challenges and perspectives

Study case: The Algerian university teachers

التعليم عن بعد خلال جائحة كورونا: التحديات والآفاق

دراسة حالة الأساتذة في الجامعات الجزائرية

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Abstract:

The outbreak of Covid 19 obliged governments around the world to find a way to keep classes ongoing and save students' and instructors' lives. Therefore, remote teaching was adopted as a challenging decision even for developed countries since it relies on the internet that provides online platforms of teaching and which is a factor that cannot be fully controlled in terms of technical issues or availability. The findings of our research according to university teachers' perspective revealed that opting for such an option was a quantum leap in teaching/learning process, yet it still needs to be subject to multi-pronged improvement and adapted to every single environment in order to disseminate it adequately.

Keywords: Remote teaching, covid19, university teachers, challenges, perspectives.

ملخص:

أُلزم تفشي فيروس كورونا الحكومات في جميع أنحاء العالم بإيجاد طريقة لضمان استمرارية الدراسة من جهة والحفاظ على حياة الطلاب والمدرسين من جهة أخرى، لهذا اعتمدت على طريقة التدريس عن بُعد الذي كان

قرارًا صعبًا حتى بالنسبة للبلدان المتقدمة لأنه يعتمد على عامل لا يمكن السيطرة عليه بالكامل من حيث المشكلات التقنية أو التوافر وهو الإنترنت الذي يزود المستخدمين بمنصات التدريس عبر الإنترنت. وقد كشفت نتائج الدؤاسة التي قمنا بها وفقًا لوجهة نظر أساتذة الجامعات أن اعتماد مثل هذا الخيار كان بمثابة قفزة نوعية في عملية التدريس و التعلم ، ومع ذلك لا يزال الأمر يحتاج إلى تحسين متعدد الجوانب كما يتطلب تكييفه مع كل بيئة على حدة من أجل نشره بشكل مناسب.

كلمات مفتاحية: التعليم عن بعد، وباء كورونا، الأساتذة الجامعيون، تحديات، آفاق

1. INTRODUCTION

Two years ago, the world was hit by a pandemic that plunged it into new unusual circumstances in all the fields, the thing that called for new strategies, such as remote work, to be adopted so as to avoid a possible recession. Teachers in Algerian universities have switched as well to remote teaching using digital platforms as an alternative to ensure the continuity of the academic activities. In this regard, teachers' views differed; some of them consider the traditional face to face teaching and learning process much more effective since it involves the physical presence of both parties and boosts the acquisition of knowledge and skills, the others suppose that the resort to digital platforms is a good opportunity to keep abreast of technological development pertaining to this field. For this purpose, and in order to explore the challenges faced by university teachers in online teaching, we conducted this research using interviews with some teachers to find out the main challenges faced during these two years of remote teaching.

2. Staggering effects of Covid 19 on the rhythm of globe:

Covid 19 was a severe health crisis that caused far-reaching implications in different sectors; schools, factories, companies and institutions have closed, economies have collapsed, millions of jobs have been lost and strict quarantine protocols have been triggered in the midst of health and life threatening conditions.

Due to restrictions imposed on travel and trade exchanges by almost all the countries in order to curb the spread of the virus, economies started suffering from an uncertain future and a few companies (Such as pharmaceutical companies) have profited from this situation. Unemployment rates have sharply increased because the majority of these economic institutions shifted to remote work which led to reduce the number of workers keeping only the key functions. Furthermore, these restriction measures enacted by governments on “international travel, the labour-intensive personal services, food and accommodation, tourism, and arts and entertainment as well as disrupted some aspects of the globalized supply chain” (Matteo, 2021, p. ii) resulted in recession and drastically Gross Domestic Product (GDP) regression especially for the developed countries after the collapse of energy and commodity prices.

United Nations (UN) reported that in addition to direct impacts of Covid 19 on the global economy such as the dramatic drop in foreign investment, a large segment of vulnerable persons like children are living in a monetary poor households unable to meet their basic needs since about 71 to 100 million people are pushed into extreme poverty (Nations, 2020, pp. 22-30), noting that economic recovery after the slump will be slow regarding the devastating effects of the pandemic.

The economically fragile countries are unable to handle the consequences of the pandemic; they cannot meet the fundamental necessities of basic public services like education and security, the thing that entrenches the extreme poverty, food insecurity, violence and crime especially in case of power vacuum in some countries. (Klaus Schwab, 2020, p. 97).

The Cultural aspect as well was hit by Covid 19; many cultural, artistic and musical activities were cancelled or postponed which led to a regression in the box office revenues by more than half in almost all the countries, however this fact gave the chance to audiovisual platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime video and Disney to prosper because they were like the only remedy in the lockdowns period.

The pandemic had an impact on the consumer behaviors and attitudes too. Actually, many reluctant consumers to digital applications and services were forced to change their daily habits: watching movies online instead of going to the cinema, having meals delivered instead of going out to restaurants, talking to friends remotely instead of meeting them in the flesh, etc. Thus, almost instantly,

most things became “e-things”: e-learning, e-commerce, e- gaming, e-books, e-attendance. (Klaus Schwab, 2020, p. 117)

During the lockdowns, as well, a lot of consumers were forced to learn to do things for themselves (bake their bread, cook from scratch, cut their own hair, etc.) (Klaus Schwab, 2020, p. 148), and felt the need to spend cautiously in order to avoid as much as possible personal financial crisis caused by a global health crisis of which no ending was looming.

3. Reshaping education systems around the world due to Covid 19 pandemic:

The sector of education was not spared the harsh consequences of Covid 19; the process of teaching and learning was adapted to the new circumstances of social distancing or even quarantines and new methods were created to ensure the continuity of educational programs in which technology is involved. Prior to the pandemic, the traditional method of teaching was based on the physical presence of both the instructor who moderates the flow of information and the students who are supposed to deepen their acquisitions by exercises in the educational institution be it a school or a university, which means that it is performed according to a specific schedule and precised place, whereas after the Covid outbreak, teaching took another form; it has become online which entails a flexible time, space and pace and the mediator is the internet.

In fact, the new form of teaching requires additional skills that must be in a teacher and a student as well namely web literacy in terms of using digital platforms of teaching such as Google classroom, Zoom, Google meet, as well as browsing the internet to find information about different topics included in the syllabuses and to look for assistance to do the assignments.

Yet, digital transformation in the education sector is not an easy task because even with the online availability of research material; in some countries researchers did not have strong internet connections to download data or could only access the abstracts of research works. Lack of E-resources both in research and in teaching made regular online activities very difficult. This impact was particularly high in less-developed areas of the globe (Marilena Vecco, 2022, p. 6).

In the developed countries and before the pandemic, most universities offered some courses online but always refrained from fully embracing online

education. The most renowned universities refused to offer virtual degrees, fearful that this might dilute their exclusive offering.

On the other hand, if online teaching continues for a long period, many students would not tolerate paying the same high tuition fees for virtual education, demanding a reduction or deferring their enrolment. In addition, many potential students would question the pertinence of spending prohibitive costs for higher education in a world marred by high levels of unemployment. So a potential solution could lie in a hybrid model; Universities should massively expand online education while maintaining an on-campus presence for a different population of students. (Klaus Schwab, 2020, p. 154)

4. Methodology:

In order to conduct this study, we have elaborated a structured interview addressed to 20 university teachers. Our interviewees are teachers at different Algerian universities including the University of Ouargla, the University of Algiers³ and the University of Ghardaia. They were selected randomly and those who could not be interviewed face to face, the questions were sent to them via their professional e-mails.

After the collection of the data, similar answers were assembled into one idea, and the different points of view were analyzed with further clarifications.

5. Data and results:

5.1. How many years have you been teaching in the university?

The years of experience of our interviewees range from 4 to 16 years, which means that all of them have experienced both the traditional and online methods of teaching, thus they have a clear and full conception of the differences between the two methods, which will in one way or another serve our research.

5.2. Covid 19 has imposed a total lockdown including schools' closure, which appealed to new teaching techniques such as E-learning platforms. What do you think of these new online teaching methods compared to the traditional ones?

In spite of the fact that E-learning platforms have become a reality in the higher education field in Algeria, teachers in different universities do not share the same opinion about them, and that could be relative to the nature of the modules they teach, the geographical characteristics of the universities they belong to which entails talking about internet quality or even the reaction of students

according to their living situations. The majority of the interviewees assert that Online teaching methods are revolutionary and reliable, they have facilitated the communication between teachers and students during Covid 19 and they have proved to be efficient and effective in guaranteeing the continuity of the teaching process, and since teaching/learning are supposed to adapt to different situations and contexts, E-learning platforms are practical and creative techniques, which respond to the needs of this generation and which also engage teachers and learners in a slightly more integrative and modern way compared to traditional methods. On the other hand, fewer numbers of interviewed teachers believe that the E-learning methods are less beneficial and less interactional notably with the lack of technological readability of some students and teachers, which makes it hard to handle compared to traditional techniques.

5.3. What are the platforms you used the most with your students and why?

The most used E-learning platforms by the interviewees, among others, were respectively: Moodle E-learning platforms adopted by Algerian universities and devoted to adapt the process of teaching and learning with the Covid 19 conjuncture, then Google Classroom and Google Meet, Facebook, collective E-mails and Coursera which was the least used platform. The reason of having this order is probably that the most used platforms are user-friendly for both teachers and students; they are easily accessible and easily used.

5.4. How effective were these online methods in terms of students' performance and results?

Even with the large and regular use of E-learning platforms for almost 2 years in higher education as a solution to ensure the continuity of lectures, they seem unsatisfactory for some teachers and do not really meet their expectations. The unsatisfied interviewees argue that the online methods were not as effective as the traditional ones for they were a momentary solution and therefore cannot replace the traditional way of teaching. As far as students' performance and results are concerned, students performed badly and their results were not as good as the ones obtained in the pre-Covid 19 context. On the opposite side, the great majority of the interviewees obtained good results, stating that the E-platforms have given students the opportunity to be a part of a direct and live interaction, the courses were available so they are better prepared and they saved their time and

teachers' efforts, however, the whole process needs a perpetual followership in order to make sure the students are keeping up with all the latest activities or contents provided by the teachers and also to check through time and time their perseverance.

5.5. What were the main constraints you have faced regarding the use of online teaching?

There was a consensus on technical problems as major constraint in the online teaching; many teachers and students suffer from bad internet flow and if it is not about internet weakness then it is about not having well trained teachers and students to deal with these platforms. Also, not all students had a laptop or a smartphone to follow the train of lessons provided by teachers which definitely impacted their scores.

Far away from the material aspect, some of the interviewees highlighted the fact that some information or lessons cannot be effectively explained and transmitted to students because they require a certain level of interaction that these E-tools are unable to provide, which led consequently to difficulties in assessing student duly.

5.6. What are your insights about online teaching in the Algerian higher education sector?

The interviewees believe unanimously that Online teaching methods, in Algeria, are still lagging behind and need more development because Algeria lacks a clear policy in the field of supporting online education. This qualitative and important leap should be given sufficient time and necessary means to be embodied in reality. Teachers and students should also be given an ongoing training in such technologies, and Algerian universities should be given special offers for high flow Internet, and spaces and computers should be provided so that all university workers can benefit from these technologies.

Until then, teachers and students will keep on relying on the traditional ways of teaching and learning in order to avoid the difficulties and hurdles related to online teaching methods.

6. Recommendations:

Through this research, the following recommendations are made so as to enhance the online teaching-learning process in the higher education sector in Algeria:

- To make agreements with the communication ministry in order to improve the internet flow and facilitate the access to the E-platforms for students as well as teachers.
- To make the E-learning optional or partial until all geographical areas are covered with a good network in order not to be unfair with students with no internet or no equipment notably in the south.
- To ensure a continuous training for both students and teachers on the use of different E-learning platforms.

7. CONCLUSION

Online teaching has become a necessity to save lives on one hand and to ensure the continuity of classes on the other hand during Covid 19 pandemic. Algeria was not away from this perspective, the higher education ministry followed the pattern adopted by the majority of countries for the same purpose, yet this experience revealed that the success of remote teaching depends exclusively on providing suitable conditions and appropriate framework in particular cases determined by the instances in charge in order to gain time and keep in pace with the technological development even in the post-pandemic period.

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